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To Youth

By

John V. A. Weaver

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1921

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1928

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JOHN V. A. WEAVER

TO YOUTH

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To David

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To Youth

To Youth

This I say to you.
Be arrogant! Be true!
True to April lust that sings
Through your veins. These sharp springs
Matter most. . . . Afteryears
Will be time enough for sleep. . . .
Carefulness . . . and tears. . . .

Now, while life is raw and new,
Drink it clear, drink it deep!
Let the moonlight's lunacy
Tear away your cautions. Be
Proud, and mad, and young, and free!
Grasp a comet! Kick at stars
Laughingly! Fight! Dare!
Arms are soft, breasts are white,
Magic's in the April night—

Never fear. Age will catch you,
Slow you down, ere it dispatch you
To your long and solemn quiet. . . .

What will matter then the riot
Of the lilacs in the wind?
What will mean—then—the crush
Of lips at hours when birds hush?

Purple, green and flame will end
In a calm, grey blend.
Only . . . graven in your soul
After all the rest is gone
There will be the ecstasies. . . .
Those alone. . . .

The Poet

The house is quiet. Everybody's settled
Down to a nap, or talkin' very low
And lazy. It's the restin'-time of day.

And so, of course old Flanders has to run
And stand at the screen-door, starin' and bristlin',
And whirlin' round, and whinin' high, and tremblin',
Tryin' to make me come. He keeps it up
Till one of us says, "It's a woodchuck, sure!"
So then I go, while he jumps up and down,
Barkin' and growlin', clawin' at the screen,
And likes to bust it down before it's open.

Then—whoosh! He's out. Two jumps,—three jumps—four
jumps—
Slower—and then he stops stock-still, and stares,

And both his ears drop down, and his tail hangs,
And he looks cheaper than a lead half-dollar.

"No? No?" he says, plainer than any words,
"No woodchuck after all? I won't believe it!"
But soon he sneaks off, very hurt and sad.

Well, we're disgusted, too. We settle down
Again, makin' some sour jokes about it.
"Old Flanders, and his woodchucks!" So it's quiet
All of five minutes.

Then we hear a scratchin'
Against the screen, and whines, and frantic barkin'.
It's him again. He scratches and he yips
Till I get up, and swear, and open the door.

So he comes rushin' in, with eyes poppin'
Like he was goin' to see a whole new world
Inside. . . .

But in a second he can tell
It's just the same old room, the same old folks,

The same old everything he's seen for years.
And so he plops himself down in the corner,
And sighs, and grunts, and lies there, very gloomy.

Then, in a couple of minutes—the same thing!
Bouncin' and quiverin' at the outside door,
And tearin' out, and always findin'—nothin'.
Then wild to get back in, crazy-excited,
And—nothin' inside either, that's any different. . . .

What do you s'pose he really hopes to find,
Inside, or outside? Why, there hasn't been
A woodchuck on the place for two or three years.
And inside, nothin' changed for longer still.

"Just the same, there was woodchucks once!" He says
To himself, I think. And he remembers how,
Streakin' across the field, fast as a flash,
He nabbed one. . . . And the wonderful crunch of jaws
Makin' it sure! . . . And then the standin' before us,

Bustin' with pride, and lookin' from it to us! . . .
And he remembers when the house was new,
And everything had got to be examined;
And all the fun of passin' things, "O. K."
And chasin' balls was still a brand-new game,
And the dog-biscuits had a strange, fresh taste,
And all the world was worth the sniffin' into. . . .

"Was?" did I say? What am I talkin' about?
His speed is slowed, his whiskers is all grey,
And yet—the wild excitement, every minute!

For him, our rooms are always magic rooms,
Stuffed full of wonders that might start to happen
Any time now! Some game he never heard of,
Or biscuits—not the same old bone and meal,
But some new kind, like somethin' out of heaven.
And, just around the corner, there's a woodchuck,
As big and easy as a cow, he's sure!
And then the glory of gettin' his teeth down in it,

And knowin' he's conquered it, and luggin' it back
For us to see, while his eyes shine and shine! . . .

Oh, Flanders, once I looked for some new game
In every room . . . and magic biscuits. . . . Oh,
And woodchucks, woodchucks just around every corner! . . .

And Who Would Not Envy Me?

When I went loveless,
  Sweet was my song
Sung to efface the tears
  That all night long
Salted my bitten lips.
Oh, aching, empty years!

One came, who gave her love
  Fair in my hands.
Waking or sleeping,
  Peace at my shoulder stands.
Fled are my daytime songs—
Fled with the nights of weeping.

The Table

•

Well, that's the table. It don't seem much to look at.
Just an old, yellow-oak thing, I suppose you'd call it.
We could have had a walnut one, long since,
Or even mahogany. But then, you see—
Thirty-eight years we had it—thirty-eight years!
That's a long time. It sort of does things to it—
Makes it into a treasure, sort of, don't it?

It was a wedding-present from Sam's father,
It and the six old chairs: four with plain bottoms,
And two with leather seats. I recollect
Like it was yesterday the very first supper
We ate at it. A Monday night it was,
We'd just come back from our honeymoon in Canada.
Sam had made the lease for the tiny house
The week before we got married. . . . Five little rooms
On Locust Street, it was.

All the whole month
We were up there, lazying 'round and going fishing,
And getting used to each other, I was worried.
I didn't see how we'd furnish the dining-room.
I had some furniture from Mother's house,
And Sam had some from *his* flat. But, you see,
There wasn't any dining-table at all.

The minute we saw the room, our troubles were through.
There was this yellow oak, all bright and shiny,
And a note from Father Graham, "Welcome Home!"

I scrambled 'round and got some sort of a meal,
It doesn't matter what. And pretty soon
We were sitting in the chairs facing each other,
So close we could touch hands.

Sam didn't pay much attention to the food.
He kept his eyes on me. You know the way
Newly-weds will go on. After a while

He didn't say a thing for most a minute,
Just looked and looked at me. And then he said,
"Mary, I guess you're about the prettiest girl
Anywhere. And I'm glad the table's short
Like this. It lets me see you all the better."

I had to laugh. "Why, silly, didn't you know
It opens in the middle? There's extra leaves
In the china-closet. We can make it big as we want!"

He looked a little sheepish. He glanced around,
And grinned, and pointed at the four other chairs.
"Oh, well," he said, "We'll have a plenty of use
For all those leaves before we're through, I reckon."

I couldn't half eat for laughing. Yes, and blushing.

See those round dents up there next to my place?
Sallie did that. She was the only one
That hammered with her spoon. She always hammered.
She was the first. . . .

Now, right there by the opening—
That's where Sam Jr. tried to carve his name
One time when he was five—or was it six?
Sam caught him just as he was finishing
The "S." It was a warm night for one bright
Young man, I want to tell you. . . .

Well, of course
We'd put in one of the extra leaves a lot
Before Ben came. The children were forever
Having friends over. But the extra leaf
Was permanent, with Ben. . . .

Then we commenced
To add the second leaf. More friends, you see.
Sam kept moving further away from me,
I used to tell him. And he'd always answer
The same thing every time. "My eyesight's fine!
I can see just as well how pretty you are."
He always said it just as if he meant it. . . .

So the children grew, and the table came to its longest.
Sallie married Tom Thorpe when she was twenty,
And they both lived with us the first three years.
The boys were going to the high-school then.
We made a grand big family, I *tell* you!
All the three extra leaves hardly made room.
Sam at one end, and me down at the other.
Ben, and young Sam, and Sallie and her Tom—
And next to her, De Kalb, in his high chair.
De Kalb was my first grandson. . . .

By that time
We had the big house up on Maple Street.
You can imagine the lively times we had—
The noise—the goings-on—the happiness!
The table certainly got its battle-scars.
Look at that brown burnt place. Senator Gaige
Put his cigar there one election-night.
Senator Gaige, no less! . . .

Well, then, Sam Jr.
Went off to college, and a short while after,
Sallie and Tom set up housekeeping in
Their own home, on the Heights. And so one leaf
Came out for good. And we didn't have much use
For the second leaf, except for company
Once in a while. And then, of course, vacations.

It was quite a shock the day young Sam left college
Half-through his second year, and went out west
To California. Oh, you mustn't think
He ran away. We told him he could go,
Although it was a real big disappointment
He wouldn't stay and finish his education.
But he was right, I guess. He made a heap
Of money selling real estate out there.
He comes back once a year for two whole weeks,
With Myra, that's his wife, and their two youngsters.

Then the old table swells back to its biggest.
It's mighty quiet when they go back home. . . .

Ben came and stayed at home almost four years
After he graduated. We kept hoping
He'd be content to settle down for good
Right here, he was doing so well in life insurance.
But that was just the trouble. The New York office
Offered him twice his salary.

. . . So he went. . . .

And the last leaf went out of the table with him. . . .

That's been two years now. Sometimes I start thinking
We ought to take a roomer. Not just any
Rag-tag and bob-tail; but some nice young man
Who needs a good home. . . . It's so quiet here. . . .

I talked to Sam about it the other night.
"My land!" I said, "The table's so little again!
You're right on top of me. Why, you can see
Every wrinkle!"

Then he laughed real low,
And put his hand across, and squeezed my hand.

"Wrinkles?" he said, "I don't see any wrinkles.
My eyes have gotten old, just like the table,
I guess that's it. But anyway, you look
As beautiful to me as ever. Why,
I guess you're just about the prettiest girl
Anywhere. . . ."

Yes. But still. . . .

Third Aisle Over

Ten o'clock every night this week, and here
It's after midnight. . . . Yeh, some "Merry Christmas!"
Customers mean and sore. . . . My back and arms—
And oh, my feet! My feet! I'm sorry, Joe.
I'll help you with the tree in just a minute. . . .

Get my presents and put 'em 'round, with yours, dear.
Ain't it the cutest set of carpenter tools—
That's a real saw, and plane, too! No, they wouldn't
Gimme much discount. But he'll love it, won't he! . . .

All right. Now here's the Santy Claus, and the tinsel.
There. And it looks real pretty, don't it, dear?
Careful about the candles in the morning! . . .

Come here, Joe. Look at that star, right over the roof!
Gee, when the El is gone, ain't it so still, though?

Ain't it the loveliest star! . . . Oh, Joe, do you feel it?
It's sort of like the city was holdin' its breath,
Or . . . prayin'. . . . Know what I mean? Why say, I feel
Real rested! Oh, it's so beautiful, I wish
We could bring him in. . . . But I guess we better wait. . . .

Oh, Joe! When he sees the tree! And the ball. . . . And the
tools! . . .

Moonlight all the Way

Gramma sits in the corner by the hearth,
Efficient-fingered, placid, and very deaf.
She knits and sews,
And does innumerable handy jobs.
She is a shadow in the shadows,
Contentedly remote,
Pleased to be noticed now and then
With shouted pleasant platitudes.
Ask her about the past.
Press her for facts.
What are facts?

Houses are facts, maybe.
And you and I are facts, and so is Gramma—
Perhaps. . . . And life's a fact. . . . Oh, yes,
And love, and work, and wedding-trips. . . .
So is romance. . . .

Canals are facts. I search for detailed facts
About canals.
Gramma has known canals.
She made her wedding-journey up the Erie.
Now for the facts.

"Oh, yes, the wedding was just after noon.
We drove to Utica, three wagons-full.
From Clinton, yes. Your Grandpa was named Clint,
You know." I knew. "The boat was waiting for us.
We got on board at early candle-lighting."

"The boat—how big was it?" I prod her gently.
She turns the matter slowly in her mind.

"Oh—pretty big. I guess it seemed lots bigger
Than what it really was. At least, at first.
It was so strange, you see, so strange and new.
There we were, setting out for the wilderness,
Two youngsters, leaving all our folks behind us,
And hardly any money to our name.

I wasn't scared—oh, don't think that. Why, Clint
Was strong and fine, and there was the job ahead,
And sixty acres homestead. . . . Still and all,
Some nights when he'd be talking to the captain,
I'd lie there, thinking over everything—
The walls would seem an awful ways away.
But I got used to it. And by the time
We got to Buffalo, the boat seemed smaller,
Lots smaller. It was our first home, you see."

A smiling silence,
Which I break patiently.
"How big? As big as canal-boats nowadays?"

"It's been so long since I saw the Erie—well—
I can't exactly figure. One thing's sure,
It was a whole lot bigger than the one
We took again at Cleveland. That was little."
I abandon the question of size.

"What did you use for power? Horses, or mules?
Or did men pull it?"

On this point she was positive, "Not men.
Horses, I think. Or—maybe it was mules.
But it wasn't men. There was only Clint and the captain,
And a funny, dried-up fellow that drove the mules—
Or horses. . . . Anyhow, he was a case.
Chewed tobacco, and never spoke a word,
Not even to the—animals. . . . The captain,
He liked to talk. He was a handsome man.
Not near as handsome as my Clint, but nice.
I can see all the three of them right now,
Dressed up for Sunday, in their flowered waistcoats.
Men don't know how to dress up nowadays.
Clint certainly looked stylish, with his hat—
A big grey beaver—and the heavy watch-chain,
All solid gold, that was. It was the only
Real valuable thing we had. And I,

I'd wear my shoes—silk shoes. My Clint made those.
He was a shoemaker by trade, you see.
A piece left over from my wedding-gown,
That's what he used. There's another in my scrap-book.
You saw it often. We made a pretty couple,
Going to church some place along the way.
That's what the captain was always saying—
'A pretty couple,' yes, that's what he said."

I let her rest after this long description.
I try a feeble joke: "And did you see
Niagara Falls?" But that's no joke to her.
The facts are what she clings to. Yes, the facts.

"Oh, no! We took a little sailing ship
The afternoon we got to Buffalo.
We didn't even stay to see the city.
It was a freighter. Not a passenger
But us. Five days it took us going to Cleveland,
Or was it six? I didn't like it much,
I can't remember. I was pretty sick.

It felt so good to get on a canal
Again—the little boat this time. We went
Up to a place called—well, now, I declare—
The name's just gone. It was real near Coshocton.
Only two hours by stage-coach. Then we went
Straight from Coshocton to our piece of land
Across the river, in a place called Roscoe.
Seems like the last part of the trip went quicker—
Quicker than up the Erie, oh, lots quicker."

A fact is peering 'round the corner.
I make a frantic grasp. "How fast? I mean
What speed did those canal-boats make per hour?"

Slowly she speaks, then gathers speed herself.
"Well—you can guess how fast a pair of horses
Could pull a good-sized boat. Or mules. I'd sit
Out on the back with Clint, up on the cabin.
The roof was flat. We didn't go so fast
We couldn't see the trees down in the water.

The willows hung so low you couldn't tell
Where leaves begun and water started in.
My, it was green. The middle west is lovely,
The loveliest place in all the world, in June,
Or anyway, we thought so then. The captain
Of the Ohio boat was a young boy,
Not quite as old as Clint. He was full of fun.
We'd all sit out there nights, he'd play the guitar.
He played it well. And all of us would sing.
Clint had the prettiest baritone! He'd roll
The verses out, and we'd join in the chorus.
The time went quick."

Once more I stab at specifications.
"How were the accommodations? Furniture good?
Beds comfortable?"

"I don't suppose you'd call them wonderful,
But they were good enough."

"Food? It tasted fine." That long, slow smile
Once more. "We didn't notice very much.
We were so happy, being let alone
On our honeymoon, and going off on adventure."

I grin. "I should say so. Now, tell me, Gramma,
How long did it take from Utica to Coshocton?"

She doesn't answer. I wonder if she heard.
In a mild yell I say the question over.

"How long? Why, just a month. Yes, just a month."

"A month!" Why, here's one concrete fact at last.

"A month to a day." She takes her glasses off,
And peers past me into the dark behind me.
Then, with conviction and simplicity
She adds her other fact, her fact of facts:
"Yes. And—it was moonlight all the way!"

Soliloquy

(Mother to girl-infant)

There you lay, so little and young and soft . . .
My baby girl . . . and my big girl some day . . .
How am I goin' to start you the right way
So's you'll get somethin' decent out of life?
Boys can take care of their self; but a girl, now . . .
You got to get the best that's goin', darlin'!
It ain't any cinch, the things you're up against . . .

Most folks would say I ought to bring you up
Good, and pure, and innocent. . . . Oh, yes,
"Be good and you'll be happy"—is *that* so?
I'm happy, I guess. Oh, I been good, all right,
And all them other things. And your Pa, yeh,
He's a "good" man—he does the best he can.
I got a roof over my head, and clo'es

Enough . . . none of the dainty things I dream of,
And nothin' fancy about this little flat,
And only movies to go to . . . and a plenty
Of dirty dishes, and always breakin' my back
Tryin' to keep things tidy . . . I don't kick;
It's got to be put up with. And poor Frank,
It ain't his fault. He *is* a good man, too.
Yeh, he is good, and I am good, . . . and so . . .

They's lots of luck about this marryin'.
Take Mary. She's another, lots like me.
Always behaved herself, and done her duty;
Nobody ever said a word against her.
Well, and she just kept goin' on, like a mouse,
Quiet and nice, workin' for Mr. Humphreys,
Bein' his private secretary, always . .
Learnin' more things about his business,
And helpin' him so well, until one day . .
She got another offer, twice the pay;

And when she told him, all of a sudden he says,
"Mary, I got so used to havin' you
Help me, and seein' you, and talkin' to you,
I couldn't stand it if you went away—"
So now she's Mrs. Humphreys, and she has
A real nice house, and everything she needs,
Even a Buick Coach . . . and a fine husband . . .
Oh, it ain't anything so very grand,
But still and all, bein' good paid . . . for her . . .

Of course, I guess the one that made the biggest
Success of any of the girls I knew
Was Rose. Nobody ever called her good!
My, when I think of how we used to talk
About her pettin' and drinkin' and runnin' around
While we was still just kids! . . . Oh, she was wild,
You bet! And everybody knew the way
She got swell dresses, and the things she did,
And all the men she had . . . but there was somethin'

About her you couldn't help but keep on likin'.
And as for men!—"Say, I can handle 'em!"
That's what she used to tell us. And she could.
She had 'em wrapped around her little finger.
Sure, she was "bad." But still, she wasn't cheap.
She had her own idears, and she stuck to 'em.
And didn't she meet Earl Coles in a cabaret,
And didn't he go completely off his nut,
And didn't she keep him jumpin' through the hoop,
And would he rest until she married him?
Well, now look at her. Money by the ton,
And swell friends—yes, and nice ones, plenty of 'em.
She's happy. Oh, she is! I can tell!
And she behaves—you bet your life she does.

And that Earl Coles is the proudest man alive.
Can't keep his eyes away from her one second.
She loves him, too . . . well, it's a great success,
That marriage . . . Yep . . . she knew her game,
and played it.

Shall I bring you up to know all about men,
And all about yourself? Ought I to raise you
So you can look at life without a wink,
And punch it in the jaw, and knock it cold?
Shall I make you a Rose? . . .

And still, there's Mary.

She was a good girl. . . .

Yes, but so am I. . . .

Oh, what's the answer?

Moth and the Flame

No! I ain't goin' back to any shoe-store!
Who does Uncle Fred think he is, I wonder.
Or what does he think I am? A quitter? Say,
Me sellin' shoes, just when I'm gettin' somewhere?

What if I don't get jobs but once a week,
Or sometimes twice? I'll show 'em yet, I tell you!
That camera-man knew what he was talkin' about,
The day he says, "Well, you're the spittin' image
Of Gilbert. Why don't you try gettin' in the movies?"

Oh, sure, it's hard. But anything is hard
At the beginning. Sure, there's thousands of extras,
And I don't stand too good at any of the windows,
But I got quite a little saved up yet,
And I ain't goin' to let nothin' discourage me.

Listen! I'll tell you somethin'. This is why

I know I'm goin' to make good, spite of Hell:
I *am* like Gilbert. Other folks can see it,
And some day one of these here dumb directors
Is goin' to use his eyes, . . . and I'll be made!

You see, last week I was a little down-hearted,
The way they treated me at the Lasky window.
But I seen the announcement, all about "Romola,"
And the "Grand World's Premeer" at Grauman's Egyptian.
So I got a sudden scheme. I says, "I'll show 'em!"

I drawed out twenty-five bucks from my savings,
And I rented a Tuxedo—say, a swell one.
I bought a copy of Photoplay, and studied
Exactly how Jack dresses, in a picture.
I didn't spare a cent, buyin' or rentin'
Duds that would look like his as near as possible.
And then I blowed five-fifty on a ticket.
Oh, so I'm crazy, am I ? Well, you'll see.

That night, there was the mobs around the entrance—

You know the way they do—two or three thousand
Crowdin' and rubberin'; and the cops pushin' 'em
Back so the stars and others can get through.
"The Royalty of Moviedom" was there—
That's what I call 'em. And the spots and sun-arcs
Shinin' the whole place up as bright as day.
And the announcer, standin' on the wagon,
And hollerin' "Barthelmess now entering!"
"Miss Mary Pickford!"—"Now, Miss Eleanor Boardman!"
"There's Monte Blue! Here's Mister Irving Thalberg!'
Gee, ain't it great, the yellin' and the people?

Well, me, I spent a dollar on a taxi,
And climbed right out, dressed up like Jack you see,
And started walkin' up that long red carpet.

The announcer looked at me three or four times,
And started to holler, but he wasn't sure.
So I kept walkin', right behind Doug Fairbanks,
And went a dozen steps, and nobody noticed.
Gee, was I wrong? Was all that spent for nothin'?
I got all cold, like I was goin' to freeze.

And then—the folks in the crowd begun to whisper!
I didn't show a sign, but was I tremblin' !
The whispers got louder, till I could hear 'em plain.
"Why didn't the announcer yell?"—"Aw, no, it can't be—
He's in New York still, ain't he?"—"Well, it is!
I'll bet you anything!"—"I know it is!" . . .

And now I was only a few feet from the door,
And all of a sudden, I heard it loud and clear—
"Hey, Jack!" "Why there's Jack Gilbert!"—"Ain't he a wonder?"
"Oh, Jack!"—"Hey, Jack!"—"Mommer there goes Jack Gilbert!"—

Do you see? Do you understand? What did I care
About the picture, or anything else in the world?
I just sat there in a crazy, happy dream,
And went right home before the intermission.

You can tell Uncle Fred to go to Hell!
I'll starve to death before I'll go back
To sellin' shoes! Me, that's like Jack Gilbert?

The Little Lost Loves

•

They are always coming back these moon-washed nights—
The little lost loves—
Through the chinks of the windows, on the soft May
breeze, . . .
Something moves

Frail and very delicate, familiar and young,
Within a corner;
And there's another winsome wraith, silent and abashed
Like an unbidden mourner.

Only shy bits of them gleam from the shadows
And tighten my throat;
A brown eye—a honeyed curl—a cheek's curve, pure
As a thrush-note.

Why must you spy upon me, little lost loves
Of my youth?

Have you not heard I have found her—my miracle
Of beauty and truth?

They answer me nothing; they huddle and shimmer
In the moon's glow,
Wistful and relentless; timidly mocking . . .
And will not go. . . .

Autumn Sonnet

Content and safe, I loll beside the fire,
  And listen to its calm, assuring roar.
It is the end. It is our passion's pyre.
  Against you I have barred the ultimate door.

I have forgotten you. In her alone
  I find the answer to the final question.
This is my life: a household of my own,
  A child, a dog, an excellent digestion.

It is some lie that under a windswept tree,
  Touching your lips, I touched my vanished youth,
And found again a young, new ecstasy.
  It is a lie, I say. This—this is Truth!

Now—I shall rest. For youth and you are gone.
Tomorrow I shall put my flannels on.

Adventure

When I was young, I always swore
That stickin' home would never do for me.
I was goin' to be a sailor, or maybe a marine,
And see everything there was to see.

I useta lay out in the orchard lot,
And dream about Frisco and the West;
Or China—or Japan—those was better still;
Or the Amazon—that was the best.

Well, now I drive a truck for the A. & P.
And the furthest away I ever went
Was out to Chicago, three years ago
Haulin' freight—but we slept in a tent.

Now I got a little place out at Richmond Hill,
A little piece of ground with a shack.

Every Sunday I go there with the wife and the kid,
And we got a sort of garden at the back.

Did you ever watch things that you planted grow?
Did you ever look sharp all around,
And find somethin' comin' where nothin' was before,
And see it crawlin' up through the ground?

Say! the funny kind of feelin' that you get all over!
Like a whole lot of things was new;
And it ain't the plant only that's swellin' and climbin'
And fightin' for its life—it's you!

Why—all of a sudden there's a singin' in your ears
That sounds like the roarin' of the sea.
And you're happy—for a minute—and you almost forget
The kind of man you wanted to be.

The Wives

So Lucy wants to marry this Marine—
"Wants to"? She's ravin', crazy wild about him;
Her face like it was new-made, twice as pretty;
And every time she says his name out loud
She makes "George" sound as if it was a song.
It's the real thing this time. And who should know it
As well as me?—and now I got to try
To tell her what I think she ought to do.
What can I say? How can I make her see?

He sure is one fine figure of a man,
So big and straight! And curly hair, and eyes
That's laughin' most of the time: and that soft voice
That's just like strokin' you when he is talkin'.
Real gentle, he is. And yet, you know right off
He can turn in a wink to somethin' hard,
And quick, and terrible, that would be awful

To fight against. Somethin' that wouldn't ever
Give in, no matter what he had to go through.

Such a grand record he made in the war!
Wounded, and decorated, and things like that.
And reënlisted right away, and stayed.
And everybody that knows him says that he's
The best top-sergeant in the whole Marines.

But now, with his enlistment runnin' out,
He swears he's through the wanderin' life forever.
"Yes, ma'am," he says to me, "I sure love Lucy.
And what I want is for us to get married,
And have a little home right near your place.
And kids. Back there in nineteen-ten, after
My hitch in the calvary, I worked two years
In the best auto-repair shop in Los Angeles.
I got to be a cracker-jack, even if I
Say it as shouldn't. Now I got a roll
Saved up, and there's this friend of mine, Jack Boals

That's crazy to have me buy in on his shop.
It's a grand business. Just the thing, you see?
I had enough of kickin' 'round the world.
You needn't to worry, Ma'am. I'm settlin' down!"

Talkin' that way and thinkin' of Lucy, he grins
So pleasant-like and tender, I know he means it,
Every word of it—now. And I almost believe
He's always goin' to feel that way . . . almost . . .

What can I tell her? Would it do any good
To say what's in my soul, day in, day out?
How can I put it so she'll really get it?
Like this? : "He's a real man, your George. The kind
That men respects, and women can't help lovin'.
Only—" And how can I say what that "only" means?

How many times I told her about her Pa!
Just such a laughin' happy-go-lucky way
He had; just so he come along one day;

One of the last that sailed the old wind-jammers;
Thirty, he was, with eighteen years of sailin'
In every sea on earth. And he was "through
With rovin' "—so he said. And so he took
My heart for keeps. Oh, yes, he "settled down."
He was a right good carpenter, and learnt
To be an expert quick. And three whole years
It was just like a dream, in our little flat.
And Lucy come. And Jim was always laughin'
So happy, and his eyes laughed too. Oh, yes—

How can I make her look ahead, and see
The way her George's laugh'll sort of fade
Till it ain't real no more? And then, one day,
She'll think he's lookin' straight into her eyes
Like always, and then all a sudden she'll feel
It isn't her he's seein', but some place
Thousands of miles away— And she'll be scared,
And ast him what's the matter. Then he'll grin,
And shake his head, and say "It's nothin'."

So she won't worry again for a few days.
And then she'll notice two or three times a week
While he is talkin', names like "Singapore"
Or "China," or "Haiti" will pop up where it don't
Make any sense. And that same look will come—

So then she'll work and fight to keep him happy.
And doll herself up fine, and take such pains!
It won't be any use. There'll be a silence
Growin' up like a wall, growin' and growin'
Until the minute comes when he can't stand it
A second more. And then it all comes out—

"I hear the surf a-roarin' on a beach
Five thousand miles from here"—those was Jim's words
That cut into my mind like with a knife.
"The wind is singin' songs to me," he says,
"I got to smell the salt again. Oh, hell,
Sure, I'm a fool. This is so sweet and nice
Here in our flat, with you and the kid. But God!

I just can't help it. Oh, I've tried to fight
Against it, but the old life's just too strong!"
What good did it do, the more I begged and begged?

"It's just a little special trip," he says,
"Down in a schooner to South America,
Me bein' skipper for this queer old duck
That's doin' explorin' around some unknown islands.
It's good pay, see? And I got quite some dough
Saved up. It's yours. And don't you worry a bit,
I'll be back soon. But I just got to go—
Just for the change. This life is killin' me,
So slow, and regular, always the same—"

And so he went; and he come back all right,
After six months, lookin' so gay and fine,
The way he used to. And he "settled down"
Again. And this time lasted 'most a year,
Until he got another skipper's job
In coastwise shippin'. But that was too tame

Of course. So then it wasn't but a year
Before he had to go with some crazy fools
That knew the place they was a buried treasure
Off somewheres in the Caribbean sea—

Nobody ever heard of any of 'em
Ever again. And I went back to Pa's,
And boarded with what was saved up in the bank,
And what I managed to scrape up with dress-makin'
Till Lucy got old enough to help, with a job
Typewritin'—

Oh, don't think it's him I blame!
I couldn't hold him, that's all. No woman ain't
Strong enough to hold that kind of a man.
It only lasts so long. There's somethin' owns 'em,
Those men. It lends 'em to us for a while,
And then—it calls 'em, and they have to go.
Huntin' for treasures—or South Sea islands, or
Alaska—what's the use of namin' places?

Somewheres—where things is happenin', that's it!
They wasn't made to sit and fret at home,
They got to go and do!

And now, it's Lucy.
"Like mother and like daughter"—that's the way
I guess you'd say it. And it's in the blood
To love that kind. . . . And yet, I got to save her. . . .

Save her? Save her from what? I got no right!
Even if she has to pay with years of cryin',
And nights of layin' wonderin' and prayin',
It's worth it! Oh, it's worth it! To have him love her—
One of the strongest, one of the bravest ones!
None of your pale-faced, creepin' stick-in-the-muds,
But a real man!

No, I ain't got the right
To say a word. It's her own life. She has
To take her chance. Why, since the world begun,
There's always us, that have to stay behind,
And watch, and cry, and hope—God help us all!

Bowl-and-Pitcher Holiday

(For Dorothy Gish)

•

No more troupin' with kids for me, that's final.
God knows the life is tough enough anyways. . . .

You see, I'm out with a turkey—"Her First False Step."
This little Dorothy, she's six years old,
And talk about your troupers! There she is,
Sleepin' on day-coach seats, or in hotels
Cockroaches wouldn't live in. And for dinner
Many's the time only one dry ham-sandwich
And maybe a couple of apples . . . and the theaters! . . .
Honest, the lousiest route of one-night stands
Anywheres in the sticks. . . . And Christmas week
Twelve shows. . . . But all the while never a yip
Outa the kid. Brother, that's troupin', that is!

Now, in the last act, it's supposed to be
Christmas, and the kid enters—you remember?

Of course, we never carried a Christmas tree,
But she was supposed to act like it was there.
Well, then, we get to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin,
And, bein' it's really Christmas, the rest of the troupe
They get a bright idea. They're goin' to give
The kid a celebration, to make her happy.
So then, Dorothy's goin' along, as usual,
Doin' her stuff real good. And the third act,
She starts to gallop on for her big scene—

And there's a real tree standin' on the stage,
Lit up with candles, and hung with all the fixin's!

She takes three steps—and her eyes starts to pop.
She stops dead in her tracks, tries to go on
Sayin' her words—and gives a couple of gulps,
And busts out cryin'. And she cries, and cries,
Watchin' the tree. And the audience all laughin',
And me dried up, with lumps stuck in my throat. . . .

Finely, they have to ring the curtain down.

I tell you, it ain't fair to have a little
Yellow-haired kid puttin' things in your head,—
Things you gave up many's the year ago.
You got to be hard-boiled to stand the gaff!

Next time, by God, they got to use a midget!

Art is Long

Bill don't play the fiddle no more;
The feelin's gone away, he says,
The feelin's gone away.

Bill was a damn good fiddler
Fifteen years ago.
He was young, and I was young,
And we didn't have much dough.
But he had pep and hopes instead,
And a lot of dreams and tunes in his head.

We used to sit in his attic room,
And jaw the hours away,
All about life, and what we'd do;
He wanted to make his pile, he'd say,
And quit, and practice day and night
And learn his fiddlin' right—oh yes,
Just learn his fiddlin' right.

So then he'd tune his fiddle up,
And start to play. And Gee,
Maybe he wasn't so awful good,
But it sure was music to me!
Right inside of my heart it went,
Sweet and mournful, or gay and quick—
Now my eyes was wet with tears,
And now I was dancin', with a laugh and a kick!

Felt like my blood was full of honey,
And I was miles and miles away
From the dirty little room, in a magic land
Where the sun was warm, and the skies was blue,
And there wasn't a thing on earth to do
But laze around, the livelong day,
With plenty of pretty girls to love,
And never a law, and never a rule—
He was a fiddlin' fool, he was—
Bill was a fiddlin' fool.

You can't deny that Bill has made
A pretty good job of life.
Packard car, and a ten-room house,
And a plump little smilin' wife.
Boss of his own big hardware store.
Weighs two hundred pounds and more—
Look at his hands, all pink and soft—
Where's the days in the attic-loft!
Lots too busy with banks and such
To think of dreams and music much—

So Bill don't play and fiddle no more.
The feelin's gone away, he says,
The feelin's gone away.

"The Mail's Got to Come Through!"

Around our village, they call him "Goofy Bill."
We're rather harsh of judgment here in Ludlow,
At least, the "woodchucks" are. I'm not a "woodchuck."
I have this farm some two miles from the village,
In the Connecticut hills. And here I stay
All summer, and some years most of the winter,
Making small trips to New York. Thus I'm neither
A "woodchuck" nor a "city guy," but something
Looked at askance by both, and hence removed,
I think, from any native prejudices.

To those hard-bitten, nickel-nursing farmers,
Bill was just "Goofy." For they have no patience
With weaklings. And a lesion in the heart
To them was only a poor excuse for shirking
The plowing, and hay-pitching, and the ordeal

Of scratching out a living from the rocks.
They jeered at him for taking easy jobs,
And said the doctors were a pack of liars,
And even when poor Bill rushed to the draft-board,
Imploring them to take him anyhow,
They said it was a feeble piece of acting.
The girl he had been courting timidly,
Laughed at him at a social, and the next week
Married a corporal in the regular army,
(Somewhat in haste) and went away to Brooklyn.

He talked to me about the girl at times,
Mournfully. He had forgiven her, he said,
And guessed she had been fooled by people's talk.
After his long harangue about her virtues—
A slut whom I had seen two or three times,
And chased, in fact, from off my orchard-lot
Where she was "loitering" with some nameless lout
One evening in the spring—I was inclined

To sympathize with all the local verdict.
Yes, he was "goofy" over several subjects.

His chief obsession was for uniforms.
Within his cloudy mind, he saw himself
Always outfitted in some dashing suit
Furnished by Uncle Sam. And he had tried
In vain the army, navy, the marines—
Every branch which wore a cap and buttons.
Be sure the village wags made much of it.
"Goofy Bill is tryin' to enlist again"—
Such was the weekly joke. . . .

Meanwhile he mooned,
And puttered, clerking at the general store,
Drawing starvation wages, teased and bullied.

I seemed somehow to have caught his confidence.
When I would drop in for some trivial purchase,
He fell into the habit of low whispers,

Drawing me to a corner, mumbling quickly
Some sentences relating to "the service."
"Couldn't you fix it? You got influence.
I'm willin' to take a chance about the heart."—
So he would speak, and scuttle to one side
When old man Meadows fixed his glare upon him.

Applejack gave me my opportunity
To give poor Bill his chance. Our usual postman
Habitually managed to be two hours late
Even in sunny weather. And he took
His route as an unpleasant adjunct to
His pleasures, which were mostly bibulous.
I stood his curses and his daily lateness,
But open warfare was the order when
A twelve-pound package was delivered through
My pantry window—which happened to be closed—
With the result that Rural Free Delivery
Number nineteen required a new incumbent.

I pondered several days. Then used my "influence"—
The little I could wield—and in the end
The job was "Goofy Bill's." . . .

And then, ah then
What spasms of laughter shook the Ludlow folk!
To Bill I loaned a hundred dollars, taking
His note for twelve months. Thus with sixty of it
He was enabled to buy old Meadows' Ford—
Of pre-war vintage, sick with all the ills
That Fords are heir to. And with the rest
He had a special uniform concocted:
Grey shoddy, studded with buttons large as hen's-eggs,
Brilliantly brass; surmounted by a cap
Of grey, bearing a label cut in steel,
"U. S. A. Mail." . . .

No knight of old, riding a prancing charger,
Could have gone forth upon the path of Honor
With stauncher pride, with more chivalric ardor

Than Bill displayed, guiding his frantic Lizzie
Upon his mail-deliveries. No more lateness!
Promptly at nine each day the clarion call,
Like some Gargantuan duck, smote on my ears,
And here came Bill, grinding around the corner,
And leaping out, the letters in one hand,
The other touching the cap in a smart salute.

"How do you like the service?" he would say.
Breathless with knowledge of efficiency,
Beaming with joy at any commendation.
And he would point toward the gasping Ford,
And call attention to its polished lamps,
Its shining coat of paint, its gleaming hubs,
Telling me of the hours he had spent
Working upon its surface and its entrails.
"The good of the service!" he would say, "I tell you
I never spare no pains! I got a motto:
'Nothin' else matters; the Mail's got to come through'!" . . .

The autumn passed, and "Goofy Bill" went on,

Grimly oblivious to the hoarse guffaws
Greeting his name about the countryside,
Filling his job even to overflowing.
And then the snow set in, gladdening eyes,
Infuriating souls. Roads became dire,
Scarcely accessible. And Bill's old car
Groaned like a wounded thing. But Bill himself,
His face aglow with zeal, fought through the storms,
And kept his tardiness to a minimum.

"Look here," I'd say, "Why can't you take it easier?
Why don't you wait, these days when it's so bad,
Until the plough can clear the roads? It doesn't
Matter if you're a little late, I'm sure.
You'll harm yourself, taking it all so hard."

He'd stare at me in hurt surprise, and gulp,
And say, "Oh, Gosh! I thought you understood!
It's Uncle Sam! The mail's got to come through!"

It was no use to argue. He was "sot." . . .

I don't believe I've ever seen a blizzard
Worse than the one which started on the night
After the January thaw last year.
All through the hours of blackness, the wind hurled
Great sheets of white upon our barren hills,
Until the whole world seemed one swirling waste,
One frozen madness in the morning's half-light.

I tried to dig a pathway to the barn,
But by the time I'd shoveled twenty yards
My tracks were covered, and the drifts were heaping
Higher than ever, while the tempest shot
Thousands of little arrows into my face.
I gave it up. I sat before my fire,
Relieved and comatose, marooned and free.

"There'll be no mail today," I said to Peggy,
"That crazy boy won't venture out in this.
It's a good thing. I thought he looked a little
Worn out from changing two tires yesterday.

That Ford of his is all right for good weather,
But this—I think he needs a bit of rest."

And I was right. For lunch-time came and passed,
And never a sign of Bill. I sat and read.

Along about three o'clock, the telephone
Summoned me. It was the postmaster at Ludlow.
Had I seen Goofy Bill? Why, no, I hadn't.
Why? Well, the damned young fool had started
Out on his route that morning, same as ever,
In spite of all the warnings they could give,
And Mr. Kimball said he had been there
Just before noon, having a hell of a time
Because the car was boiling, and the road
Had drifts across it more than five feet deep—

That was enough for me. Cursing, but anxious,
I called to Frank, my hired hand, to come.
We threw into the Buick several blankets,

Two shovels, and a flask of my best brandy,
And plunged into the blizzard. . . .

It took us half an hour to make Kimball's.
Slithering, shoveling, shoving, scraping the ice
Every two minutes from the coated windshield.
Kimball was loud in his denunciation
Of jackasses who couldn't stay at home
And let the mail go hang. Nevertheless
He joined us in the search. So out we lurched
Upon the back-road leading through the valley.

That trip defies description. . . .

Twenty minutes
Down that incredible road, we found the Ford
Down in the ditch, lying upon its side,
Its wheels beckoning in a ridiculous
Appeal. No mail-bag in it. Not a sign
Of Bill. Only the snow lashing and screaming. . . .

We found him in the valley, half a mile
Short of my house, stumbling in a circle
Mechanically. There was a mask of ice
Crusting his face. His eyebrows were pure white.
And from the visor of his silly cap
Hung tiny icicles. . . . He couldn't speak. . . .
He fought me, though, when I made my attempt
To pry the mail-bag from his frozen hand. . . .

He will recover—at least, partly recover.
Six months in bed will mend his tired heart
Enough for him to clerk in Meadows' store,
Taking it easy. He had to lose three fingers
From his right hand. His eyebrows will grow back. . . .

I didn't tell you of the words he whispered
As soon as he could whisper anything.
Of course, you've guessed them. Yes, it was the sentence:
"The mail had to come through!" . . .

The mail-bag's contents
Consisted of two post-cards, seven bills
And a Sears Roebuck catalogue. . . .

Ginestre

Italy—
Not the pictorial unreality
Of Vesuvius, blowing his smoke
Into the sky's blue eyes;
Nor the scampering ants
Of Naples;
Nor the virility
Of Rome;
Nor the melodrama
Of Venice;
Nor the blue-gray calm
Of Siena—
Not any town.
The heart—
The nose!

Wait.

The heart, first.

The operatic moon gleamed down
At midnight on the Arno.
Upon a low stone pier
A man munched bread,
Dangling his feet.
No one was near.
He talked to himself aloud
With singing.
His face uplifted to the tinselled night,
He sang full-throated—
Rollicking songs,
Sad songs.
Not for me.
For the moon, perhaps.
For his soul.

I left him.
I slept.

Tumult awakened me.
I ran to the window.
Shutters were closed.
In the white morning sunlight
It marched and countermarched—
A band,
Resplendent in scarlet and gold,
Strutting and clicking
Behind the prancing drum-major.
What were they playing?
Who knows? Who cares?
Earth-shaking, ear-shattering
Happy din,
Rattling the windows
Like an epileptic's teeth.

Children, uttering music
Because music was in them,
Bursting from them.

I laughed,
I wondered.
I laughed,
And tears were in my eyes.

The heart—then the nose.

Remembering,
I started through the mountains.

Suddenly
Wave upon wave of fragrance bathed me.
Simple, frank, gentle,
Naïve as the notes of birds,
As the soft speeches of a child.
Soothing, dreamy, delicate.

With that pungent perfume
Came not understanding,
But feeling.

I did not comprehend—
I knew.
The little man, the lonely band—
The yellow flower.
Italy was unfolding its heart to mine.
Heart of a wildflower.
Ginestre.

To Margaret

How shall I put in words the glory of you?
  How capture hints of your perfection's whole?
  "Your body's loveliness . . . your radiant soul—"
I, so incredibly privileged to love you,

Falter and hesitate. How could there be
  Sentences adequate to catch the grace
  Of spirit shining in your candid face—
Your Being's music, sounding ceaselessly?

"You are all Beauty; you the essential dream
  Poets have clutched for, since the world was new!"—
  See how the petty phrases chirp and coo,
See what a shallow mockery they seem! . . .

Go unsung, then, my love! . . . Give me your hand. . . .
Look in my eyes. . . . Now do you understand? . . .

To My Son

"To follow the dream—and again to follow the dream—and so—*ewig—usque ad finem!*"
—CONRAD'S "LORD JIM."

Must you frown so?
Must you scowl so bitterly?
Oh, I know
It's very strange, after the warm, dark silence—
This cold, confused inanity.
But don't frown.
Nothing lasts forever, be assured.
Only a few years, after all, to be endured;
Then you may go back down
Into the tranquil nothingness.
You have my word.

What can you have heard
While you were where you were?

Did some subtle rumor seep
Into your deep
Calm of nonentity?
Can it be
They have warned you what you may expect?
Did they say how you must grope
With only a hint of what you are groping for?
And fight, and ache, and hope
And only guess what you are hoping for?
Did they say how you will see
Beauty scorned and trampled, and the ugly
Triumph of efficient swine, guzzling smugly?

Oh, it's all true enough.
You will observe
Senseless tragedy, incomprehensible pain.
And you will find you cannot do enough,
Try as you may,
To keep your white integrity
From the world's stain.

And there will be many a tortured night
When you will stare and stare,
And tear
At your own flesh, and toss, and bite
The pillow in your agony,
Because you cannot make your dream come right.
(Do not delude yourself, dear boy;
One does not ever make the dream come right)

But the dream—follow it!
Never abandon it, though the pursuing take you
Into the mire, into the desert places
Where no help is; into the filth and squalor
Clotted with brutish, empty faces;
Into destruction, death.
Not for a moment will you see it clear,
Your dream.
You must not hope to. It is the chase that matters.
Though your flesh become ribbons,
And your spirit, tatters.

Drive! Drive!
Follow the dim gleam
Follow!

There will be those who will seek to divert
Your eyes from your dream.
Many will plot and scheme
How they may blind you,
How they may bind you.
And there will be a few
Loving you,
Who will endeavor to guard you from all hurt.

Listen to none!
Yourself, you must fight through!
Defiance to the foe, gentleness to the friend,
But in the end
The way of the dream is the lonely way.
They are they.
You are you.

And what can I promise for a reward?
Is there, then, nothing but the hard
March toward
A will-o'-the-wisp,
With oblivion beyond?

Oh, yes! Along the road that you must go
You will find bits of dream-trail here and there.
Sunsets, and purple dawns, and the slow
Drift of the moon . . . melodies, and
The soft richnesses of women's hair. . . .
And lips that cling and tremble . . . or a hand
Clasping yours firmly, stanchly, joyously . . .
And there are fragrant souls that hide away,
But may be glimpsed by one who seeks . . .
Other dream-hunters, too . . .
And the compelling blue
Of the sea . . . and something that speaks
Out of the earth, in April . . . and the glow
Of ripened fruits, in autumn . . . and the sparkle

Of starlight on the snow . . . and the crisp patterns
That words can make . . . and the sweet curves
Of thighs and breasts . . . and the inscrutable fog . . .
The gay, devoted banter of a dog . . .
The bursting green of the grass, after
The pelt of rain . . . and the brooks' laughter . . .

But—enough.
Search out your own dream-stuff.
It will guide your stumbling soul
Toward the mist-enshrouded goal.

Come, now.
Set out upon your futile quest.
Chase your dream, the while you know
You will never grasp it.
Up, then! Go!
Earn your timeless rest . . .

Must you frown so? . . .

A NOTE ON THE TYPE
in which this Book is set

This book is set on the Linotype in
GARAMOND,
a modern rendering of the type first cut
in the sixteenth century by
Claude Garamond (1510–1561), a pupil of Geofroy Tory.
He gave to his letters
a certain elegance and a feeling of movement
which won for their creator
an immediate reputation and the patronage
of the French King, Francis I.

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